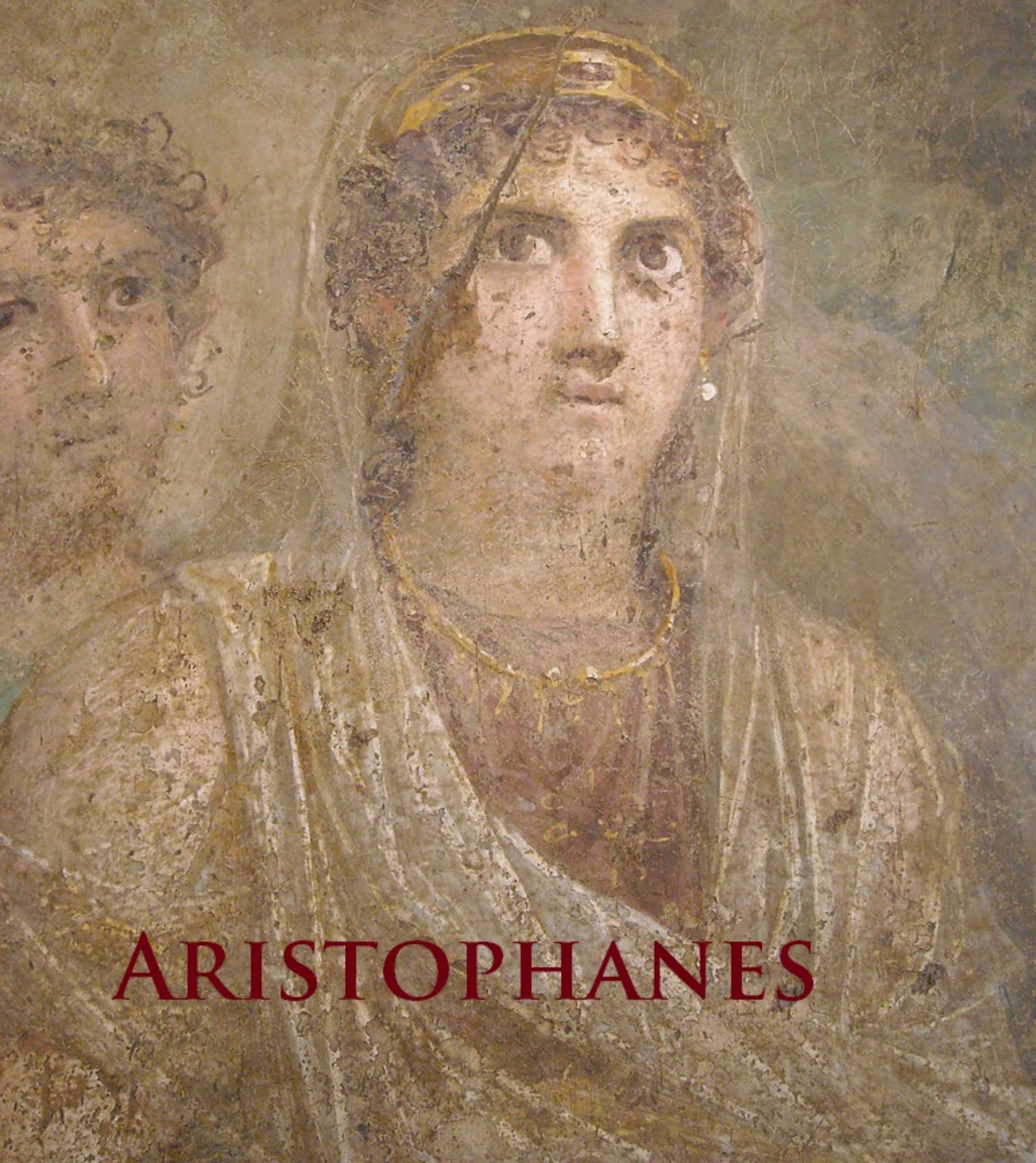


EKKLESIAZUSAI



ARISTOPHANES

ASSEMBLY-WOMEN

Speaking Characters

PRAXAGORA: Athenian woman, wife of BLEPYROS, organizer of the women's plot

WOMAN^A }
WOMAN^B } Athenian citizen-wives
WOMAN^C }

BLEPYROS (*Blepúros*): elderly Athenian, husband of PRAXAGORA

NEIGHBOUR: of BLEPYROS'

CHREMES: elderly Athenian citizen

HERALD: female replacement for the city's male herald

GIRL: young unmarried Athenian

YOUTH: lover of the GIRL

HAG^A }
HAG^B } three elderly Athenian women
HAG^C }

SERVANT: female slave of PRAXAGORA's

CHORUS: of Athenian wives, associates of PRAXAGORA's

LEADER: of the CHORUS

Silent Characters

PARMENON: slave of CHREMES

SIKON: slave of CHREMES

[The scene is an Athenian street shortly before dawn; the scene building contains at least two doors. From one of them enters a woman dressed in a man's cloak and shoes, carrying a lamp, walking-stick, and some garlands. After looking round impatiently, she starts to address the lamp in an exaggeratedly solemn, prayer-like manner.]

PRAXAGORA. Bright eye of light that issues from my lamp,
 Most beautiful design of clever minds!
 Your birth, just like a god's, I celebrate,*
 Since born upon a potter's turning wheel
 Your nostrils shed a light fit for the sun.
 [Waving the lamp] Send out the signs of fire that we agreed!
 Yes, you alone are privy to our deeds,
 When in our bedrooms all we women move
 In Aphrodite's twists, and you stand near.
 As bodies writhe and bend, your eye is there 10
 To look on all; you never get removed.
 You alone see what lies hidden between our thighs,
 When shining there to singe our bushy hair.*
 Or when for food or juice of grape we steal
 Into the larder, you assist us well,
 Yet never blab our secrets to the neighbours.*
 So in return for this I'll let you share
 The plans my friends decided at the Skira.
 [She looks around, and her tone now becomes much plainer.]
 Yet not a single woman's here on time.
 It's getting close to dawn, and very soon 20
 The Assembly starts: we need to find good seats
 (To use a phrase Phyromachos made famous)*
 And settle down without attracting notice.
 What's held them up? Perhaps they can't get hold
 Of the woollen beards they were told to bring along.
 Or maybe creeping out in their husbands' cloaks
 Proved difficult for them. Ah, now I see
 A lamp approaching. I'd better stand back here,
 In case a *man* is coming down the street!

[Enter several more women dressed in men's clothes.]

WOMAN^A. We'd better get along: just now I heard 30
 The herald's voice crow out a second time.*

PRAXAGORA. I've been out of bed and waiting for you to come

Right through the night! Well, now's the time for me
To call my neighbour here with a tap on the door.

[*She scratches on one of the doors.*]

Her husband mustn't be disturbed.

WOMAN^B [*emerging on tip-toe*]. I heard

Your fingers scratch as I fastened on my shoes.

I wasn't asleep, my dear, because my husband—

He comes, this man of mine, from Salamis—

Was *rowing* me all night on top of the bed.

I've only managed to get his cloak just now.

40

PRAXAGORA. Look, here come other women along the street:

They're friends of ours; I recognize their faces.

[*In what follows, various women arrive from both side entrances, either alone or in small groups, all of them at least partially disguised as men.*]

WOMAN^A [*calling*]. Well hurry up there! You know an oath was
sworn

The last of us to arrive would pay a fine—

Nine litres of *wine*, and a bag of chickpeas too!

WOMAN^B. D'you see that woman there, old thingummy's wife?*

She's running in her husband's shoes.

WOMAN^A [*bitchily*]. But surely

With a husband like *him*, she can't be busy at night!

WOMAN^B. Can you see the publican's wife, that thirsty girl?

Is that a torch she's waving in her hand?

50

WOMAN^A. And *I* can see two other familiar faces,

And lots of other women approaching here:

It looks as though we're turning out in force.

WOMAN^C [*entering, to PRAXAGORA*]. My dear, I had a simply
dreadful time

Slipping out of the house. My husband coughed all night—

He'd had too many anchovies for supper.

PRAXAGORA. Right, all sit down. I'll start by asking you,

Now that I see that everyone's arrived:

Have you done what we decided at the Skira?

WOMAN^A [*showing off*]. I certainly have! I've let my armpits grow 60

Far shaggier than a bush, as we agreed.

And whenever my husband went to the Agora,

I covered my body in oil and spent the day

Standing in the sun, to try to get a tan.*

WOMAN^B. Me too. I actually threw my razor out,
 To guarantee I'd grow *hirsute* all over
 And lose all trace of femininity!

PRAXAGORA. And have you got the beards which we agreed
 You'd all bring with you to the meeting here?

WOMAN^A [*producing one*]. Not half, by Hekate! Look at this
 beauty here.

70

WOMAN^B. And mine's a better beard than Epikrates'!*

PRAXAGORA. And the rest of you?

WOMAN^A. They've got them: look they're
 nodding.

PRAXAGORA. I can see you've made the other preparations:
 You've all obtained your husbands' shoes and sticks
 As well as their cloaks, exactly as agreed.

WOMAN^A [*producing a huge stick*]. Yes, this is Lamios' stick I've
 brought along:

I smuggled it out while *he* was fast asleep.

WOMAN^B. Are you sure it's Lamios' stick—not farting Lamia's?*

PRAXAGORA. With a stick that size, he only needs a jerkin

Like that of Argos, hundred eyes and all,
 To make himself a terrifying cowherd!*

80

But now we must proceed with preparations,
 Before the stars have vanished from the sky.

The Assembly which we're ready to attend
 Will start its meeting once the dawn's arrived.

WOMAN^A. You're right; you must make sure we get the seats
 Below the platform, facing the Prytaneis.

WOMAN^B [*producing wool*]. I thought I'd bring these things along
 with me.

I'll comb the wool while the meeting's filling up.

PRAXAGORA. 'Filling up', you silly thing!

90

WOMAN^A. Of course; why not?

I'd still be able to listen while combing wool.

My children haven't a stitch of clothing to wear.

PRAXAGORA. You'd sit there combing wool? You're not supposed
 To give the men a glimpse of a woman's body!

What a pretty mess we'll face if the meeting's full

And one of us steps in with clothes hitched up,

Revealing a large and hairy—Phormisios!*

But if we're first to occupy our seats,

We won't be noticed wrapped up in our cloaks.
 And once we've got our long beards fastened on, 100
 No one will doubt our male identity.
 Agyrrhios borrows his beard from Pronomos,*
 So people forget he used to be a woman!
 And now he dominates political life.
 Well, *he's* the reason why, this very day,
 We've got to execute our daring deed,
 In the hope that we can seize the city's affairs
 And manage to change its fortunes for the better.
 As things stand now, 'we've neither sails nor oars'.*
 WOMAN^A [*mock-gravely*]. 'But how could female minds in
 congregation'* 110
 Make public speakers?
 PRAXAGORA. Perfectly, you'll see!
 It's said the young men who get 'knocked' the most
 Grow up to make outstanding politicians.*
 Well, we possess this qualification too!
 WOMAN^A. I'm not so sure. We badly lack experience.
 PRAXAGORA. But that's precisely why we've gathered here,
 To rehearse our lines before the meeting starts.
 So get your beard attached without delay,
 And likewise anyone else who's practised speaking.
 WOMAN^A. Aren't *all* we women experts with our tongues? 120
 PRAXAGORA. Then fasten your beard, and turn into a man.
 I'll put these garlands aside, and fasten on
 My own beard too, in case I decide to speak.
 [*All the women start to attach false beards.*]
 WOMAN^B. O look at us all, Praxagora darling, here!
 We really are a terribly funny sight.
 PRAXAGORA. Why 'funny'?
 WOMAN^B. It's just as though you fastened beards
 On cuttle-fish that had a light brown grilling!*
 PRAXAGORA [*playing the herald*]. Official purifier, carry the—cat.*
 Stand forward, people. Ariphrades, stop talking!*
 You, come to the front for a seat. Who wants to speak? 130
 WOMAN^A. I do.
 PRAXAGORA. Then wear this garland for good luck.
 WOMAN^A. All right.
 PRAXAGORA. Now speak.

- WOMAN^A. Before I've had a drink?
- PRAXAGORA. A drink!
- WOMAN^A. That's why I put the garland on!*
- PRAXAGORA. Away with you! You would have made this gaffe
In the real Assembly.
- WOMAN^A. But surely they drink there too?
- PRAXAGORA. Just listen to her!
- WOMAN^A. I swear they really do,
And it's unmixed too!* Well, think of their *decisions*,
The kind of things they bring themselves to do.
Their craziness suggests inebriation!
What's more, they're always pouring out libations— 140
Why else, if not to help themselves to wine?
And then they swap abuse just like real drunks,
And the archers have to carry the worst ones out.*
- PRAXAGORA. Well, *you* can sit back down! You're simply useless.
- WOMAN^A. My god, I wish I'd never worn that beard!
I feel so warm I'm going to die of thirst.
- PRAXAGORA. Does another woman wish to speak.
- WOMAN^B. I do.
- PRAXAGORA. Then put on a garland. We need to press ahead.
Make sure you speak in a good deep masculine voice,
While leaning stylishly upon your stick. 150
- WOMAN^B [*like a male speaker*]. I would have preferred that one
of the usual speakers
Should put the case, while I stayed in my seat.
As it is, I need to put my own proposal—
That taverns mustn't fill their vats with water.
That's my suggestion, by the two goddesses!*
- PRAXAGORA. The two goddesses! Are you mad, you silly woman?
- WOMAN^B. What's wrong? At least I didn't request a drink.
- PRAXAGORA. That's true, but you swore an oath no *man* would
use,
Though the rest of your speech was quite a skilful piece.
- WOMAN^B [*adjusting*]. By *Apollo*, so I did! 160
- PRAXAGORA [*taking the garland*]. That's quite enough!
I won't advance one step towards the Assembly,
Unless we get our speeches polished up first.
- WOMAN^B. Give me back the garland, then; I'll try again.
I think I understand what's needed now.

[*In a man's voice*] I wish to state my view, assembled
women—

PRAXAGORA. You address the men as 'women', you imbecile?

WOMAN^B [*pointing to audience*]. It's because of Epigonos there.*

I glanced across

And thought that I was speaking just to women.

PRAXAGORA. I've had enough of you as well: sit down!

You've left me with no choice. I'll take this garland

170

And speak myself. I call upon the gods

To send success and fortune to my plans.

[*Like a politician*] This land belongs to me as well as you,

My citizens. I'm vexed and grieved to see

The poor condition the city's affairs are in.

I notice how she always has as leaders

The rotten types. If one of them is decent

For one whole day, he's rotten then for ten!

If you switch to another, he'll only make things worse.

Now it's hard to give advice; you're easily piqued.

180

But you shy away from those who wish you well

And keep on turning to those who wish you ill.

There was a time when Assemblies hardly mattered,

And everyone was sure Agyrrhios

Was a rotten man. But now the Assembly counts;

Those who draw pay adore Agyrrhios;

While those who don't regard the rest as frauds

For living on their payment from the Assembly.*

WOMAN^A. You're absolutely right, by Aphrodite!

PRAXAGORA. An oath by *Aphrodite*, you silly thing?

190

How fine that would have sounded in the Assembly!*

WOMAN^A. I wouldn't have said it there.

PRAXAGORA. Then don't do now!

[*Continuing*] And just remember how the people thought

The city would never survive without this league.*

But when it happened, they hated it so much

The one who proposed it disappeared for good.

Suppose we need to launch a fleet: the poor

Will vote for that, but not the rich or farmers.*

At one time Korinth and you feel mutual spite;

But soon you're back in one another's credit.*

200

'Argives are stupid'; 'Hieronymos is shrewd'.*

We caught a glimpse of peace, but Thrasyboulos
Is angry that his services aren't required.*

WOMAN^A. This man's astute!

PRAXAGORA. Now *that's* the way to praise.

[*Continuing her speech*] The blame for all these things is *yours*,
the people's.

You're happy to draw your pay from public funds,

Yet each one thinks in terms of private gain

While the common good just *reels*—like Aisimos.*

Well, if you heed my words there's still some hope:

I propose we hand the city's business over

210

To *women*. After all, inside our homes

They hold the purse strings tight and run our affairs.*

WOMAN^A [*applauding*]. Quite wonderful!

WOMAN^B. Let's hear some more,
good chap!

PRAXAGORA. Their traits are quite superior to ours,

As I'll explain. For one thing, all of them

Maintain traditional ways of dyeing wool;

You'll never find them trying to *innovate*.

Contrast that point with what the city does:

If something old seems fine, it won't be kept

But has to be replaced by novel schemes!*

220

The women sit and cook—they always have.

They carry things on their heads—they always have.

They hold the Thesmophoria—always have.

They bake their pastry cakes—they always have.

They grind their husbands down—they always have.

They keep adulterers hidden—they always have.

They keep their secret rations—they always have.

They like to drink pure wine—they always have.

They really love being *fucked*—they always have.

So let us, men of Athens, halt debate

And hand the city over to the women.

230

No need to ask what policies they'll have;

Let's simply give them power, remembering this:

As mothers of our sons they'll want to save

The soldiers' lives, but also send them food

To boost their rations when they're on campaign.

A woman's good at finding new resources,

And once in power could never be deceived:
 They're too familiar with deceit themselves!
 I'll say no more. If my proposal's followed,
 The future holds prosperity for all.

240

WOMAN^A [*in her normal voice*]. O darling Praxagora, what
 amazing speech!

Where on earth, my dear, did you learn rhetorical skills?

PRAXAGORA. In the war I lived with my husband on the Pnyx:*

I used to listen to speakers and learn their words.

WOMAN^A. That explains how you made such a *terribly* clever
 speech.

We women will now elect you on the spot

To be our general* and carry out your plans.

[*Thinking*] But what if confounded Kephalos shouts abuse?*

What kind of response will you give him in the meeting?

PRAXAGORA. I'll tell him his mind's all muddled.

250

WOMAN^A. But everyone

Knows that already.

PRAXAGORA. I'll say that he's *demented*!

WOMAN^A. They know that too.

PRAXAGORA. Then I'll say his pottery

Is dreadful stuff, and his politics are potty!

WOMAN^B. What if bleary Neokleides abuses you?

PRAXAGORA. I'll say to *him*: he should squint up a dog's
 backside!

WOMAN^B. And if the people start to shout and heckle?

PRAXAGORA. I'll love every minute—I'm used to being knocked!

WOMAN^A. But there's one more thing: supposing that the
 archers

Try to drag you off, what then?

PRAXAGORA [*like a wrestler*]. I'll use my elbows,

Like this: they'll never grab me round the waist!

260

LEADER. And if they lift you up, we'll shout 'lay off'!

WOMAN^A. I think we've planned for all contingencies.

The only thing we haven't discussed is how

We mustn't forget to vote by raising *hands*:

We're all so used to lifting up our legs!*

PRAXAGORA. That might prove problematic; we'd better vote

By keeping one arm free outside our cloaks.

[*To all*] Well, now we must be moving: hitch up your tunics,

And don't delay in putting on your shoes
 Just like you've often seen your husbands do 270
 When going off to the Assembly or to town.
 Then, after taking care of all these things,
 Tie on the beards you've brought. And when that's done,
 And you've adjusted them to fit you well,
 It's time to fasten up your husbands' cloaks
 Which you smuggled from the house. Then take your sticks
 And lean on them when walking down the road,
 While singing an old-men's song, just like the ones
 The country people sing.*

LEADER. A good idea!

WOMAN^A. The rest of us should go ahead of them, 280
 To meet the country women who've gone straight there
 To the Pnyx.

PRAXAGORA. Yes, hurry along! You know that those
 Who don't turn up at the Pnyx at the crack of dawn
 Must slink back home with nothing at all to show.*

[PRAXAGORA, WOMAN^A, WOMAN^B *make their way off by a side entrance. The remaining women, now fully costumed in false beards and their husbands' clothes, take up formation as the CHORUS.*]

[PARODOS: 285-310]

LEADER. The time has come, my fellow men, for us to be
 proceeding.

Yes, *men's* the word, we must remember, despite our
 female nature.

The danger that we face is great: suppose we were detected
 While in the act of secretly embarking on this venture!

[*They start to mimic, in movements and singing, a group of old countrymen on their way to the Assembly.*]

CHORUS. Let's get to the Assembly, fellow men. *Strophe* 290
 The Archon has made a threat:*
 Unless you're there at dawn,
 And can show the dust on your feet,
 With a breakfast of garlic inside you
 And a sour old look on your face,
 You won't get your three obols' pay.*

So come on now, old greybeards!
 We really must rattle along.
 Be sure keep pace with me.
 You must be on your guard: 295
 We can't afford wrong notes.
 You must maintain the show.
 And when we've got our tickets,*
 Ensure we sit together,
 To vote *en masse* for measures
 Proposed by fellow women—
 Oh dear, what *am* I saying?
 I meant our fellow *men*!

Be sure to push aside these urban folk. *Antistrophe*
 Before, when the pay was low,
 Just a single obol in fact,* 302
 They'd sit there in the market,
 By the garland-makers' stalls,
 To gossip the whole day long.
 But *now* they come crowding in here!
 It was different in the old days.
 Myronides was general,
 A man of finest stock.
 Then no one got a payment
 For running the city's affairs.
 No, people would come along
 With a flask of wine and some bread,
 Two onions and maybe three olives.
 These days they come for the money:
 Three *obols* is all they want.
 They've turned this public service 310
 Into a labourer's job!

[As the song ends, the CHORUS exits by a side entrance. From a door in the stage building emerges, sheepishly, a man wearing a woman's yellow dress and shoes.]

BLEPYROS. What's going on here? And where on earth's my wife?
 No sign of her—and yet it's nearly dawn!
 I've been lying awake for ages, needing a shit,
 And trying to find my shoes and cloak in the dark.

I felt all over the bed without success,
 While the dung-collector kept knocking at my door.*
 That's why I grabbed this dress that belongs to my wife
 As well as pulling on these boots of hers.
 [*Looking round*] But where, oh where can I find a spot to
 shit?

320

Perhaps it doesn't matter during the night:
 No one will see me shitting as early as this.
 What a wretched fool I was to take a wife
 At *my* great age. I deserve to be flogged as an ass!
 My wife has surely left the house to do
 Some mischief. Anyhow, time to ease myself.

[*He squats; another door opens, and a NEIGHBOUR, also dressed in women's clothes, emerges with a lamp.*]

NEIGHBOUR. Who's over there? Blepyros from next door?

BLEPYROS. I'm afraid it's me all right.

NEIGHBOUR. What's going on here?

You look all yellow; there must be something wrong.

[*Facetiously*] Don't say Kinesias has crapped on you? 330

BLEPYROS [*embarrassed*]. He certainly hasn't. I've had to come
 outside

Just wearing this yellow dress which belongs to my wife.

NEIGHBOUR. But where's your cloak?

BLEPYROS. I haven't the faintest idea.

I looked but couldn't find it on the bed.

NEIGHBOUR. Then didn't you tell your wife to find it for you?

BLEPYROS. Some hope! She isn't inside the house at all.

She's managed to slip outside without my knowledge:

I'm afraid she must be up to some scheme or other.

NEIGHBOUR. Well I'll be blown! Your experience matches mine

Precisely. *My* wife too has left the house 340

And taken with her the cloak that I was wearing.

I wouldn't mind, but she's taken my shoes as well!

At least, I couldn't locate them, search high and low.

BLEPYROS. By Dionysos! I had that problem too.

I couldn't find my shoes, but needed to shit,

So I had to shove my feet inside these boots.

Otherwise I would have soiled my nice clean blanket!

What's it all about? Don't tell me one of her friends

Has invited her to breakfast.

NEIGHBOUR.

That's what I think;

I can't believe she's doing anything worse.

350

[*Turning away*] That must be a rope you're excreting; I've got to go.

It's time to be off to attend the Assembly meeting—

That's *if* I can find my one and only cloak!

BLEPYROS. I'll do the same, once I've managed to ease myself.

At the moment there must be something causing a block.

NEIGHBOUR [*as he goes in*]. Surely not the blockade Thrasyboulos mentioned!*

BLEPYROS. By Dionysos! It's certainly clogging me up.

Well, what am I going to do? It isn't just

My present discomfort. But when I eat again,

I don't know how my shit will find an exit.

360

This door of mine's been well and truly bolted.

It's the work of some anonymous constipator!

[*To audience*] Could someone fetch a doctor? But which of them?

I need someone who's trained in anal matters.

What about Amynon? Wait: he might deny it.*

Let someone hurry and fetch Antisthenes.*

To judge by all the groans he makes, he knows

The meaning of an arse that needs to shit.

[*Melodramatically*] O goddess of childbirth, Eileithya! *Please*

Don't let me burst, don't keep me bolted up!

370

I don't want to be a comic chamber pot.*

[*Enter an elderly man along the street.*]

CHREMES. Eh you! What's up? You're surely not *shitting*?

BLEPYROS [*rising*].

What, *me*!

I'm certainly not: I can't. I'm just getting up.

CHREMES. Is that your wife's little dress I see you're wearing?

BLEPYROS. It's all I could lay my hands on in the dark.

But where have *you* just been?

CHREMES.

The Assembly meeting.

BLEPYROS. Is it over already?

CHREMES.

It finished right after dawn!

And Zeus above, you should have seen the mirth

At the number of people smeared by the crimson rope.*

BLEPYROS. Did you manage to get three obols? 380

CHREMES. If only I had!

I arrived too late, which makes me feel ashamed.

BLEPYROS. No need to feel that way—though you'll probably starve!

But what was the problem?

CHREMES. A massive crowd of people,
Unprecedented hordes that filled the Pnyx.

In fact, we started comparing them all to cobblers

When we looked at them: it really beggared belief

To see so many white faces in the Assembly.*

That's why there were plenty of us who missed the pay.

BLEPYROS. So if I turned up now, I'd get no pay?

CHREMES. You wouldn't have got the pay if you'd even arrived 390

At second cockcrow!

BLEPYROS [*like a tragic actor*].

O alack alas!

'Antilochos, lament your fill for me

And not for my—three obols. The loss is mine.'*

[*Normally*] But what was happening there, to make this throng

Turn up in such good time?

CHREMES. The reason was

The Prytaneis had put down on the agenda

The city's preservation.* And straight away

Bleary-eyed Neokleides sidled to the rostrum.

You can just imagine the way the people shrieked

'It's scandalous that *he* should dare to speak, 400

When the subject is the city's preservation.

He doesn't know how to preserve his own eyesight!'

He looked around and shouted back to them:

'Well, what else can I do?'

BLEPYROS [*like a heckler*]. 'Just take some garlic,

Mix it with fig juice, add the bitterest spurge,

Then smear it on your eyelids in the evening!'

That's what I would have said if I'd been there.

CHREMES. Euaion, brilliant fellow, came up next,*

Without a cloak—or so it seemed to *us*,

But he himself insisted he had one on. 410

His speech was full of populist arguments:

‘You see that I’m in need of preservation;
I need some decent clothes. But none the less
I’ll tell you how to save the whole of Athens.
If all the needy folk were given cloaks
By tailors every winter, then we’d find
That no one ever suffered from pleurisy.
And those who have no bed or blankets either,
Should wash and then go off to sleep the night
In the tanners’ shops: any tanner who refuses,
In winter time, should pay a three-cloak fine.’

420

BLEPYROS. What excellent proposals! He would have found
Unanimous support if he’d also said
The grain-retailers ought to supply the poor
With enough for everyone’s dinner, or else be thrashed.
In either case, Nausikydes would have paid!*

CHREMES. The next to speak was a young and handsome man.
His face was white; he looked like Nikias.*
He leapt to the rostrum to speak, and started to say
We ought to hand the city over to *women*!
Applause broke out at once, and cries of approval—
From the horde of cobblers, that is;* the country folk
Just rumbled dissent.

430

BLEPYROS. And quite right too, by Zeus!

CHREMES. But they lacked the numbers. The speaker shouted on,
With nothing but praise for women, but calling *you*
Abusive names.

BLEPYROS. Like what?

CHREMES. He said, to start with,
That you’re a rogue—

BLEPYROS. And *you*?

CHREMES. Please let me finish.
And also a thief.

BLEPYROS. Just *me*?

CHREMES. And furthermore
An informer.*

BLEPYROS. Just *me*?

CHREMES [*gesturing to the audience*].

And all of them as well,
Yes, every man jack.

440

BLEPYROS. Who disagrees with *that*?

CHREMES. A woman's head, he said, is packed with sense
 And ideas for making money. He said they never
 Divulged their secrets from the Thesmophoria,
 While you and I keep leaking Council business.

BLEPYROS. I swear by Hermes, that's absolutely true!

CHREMES. He said our women lend each other things—
 Like clothes and precious jewels and drinking-cups—
 Informally, no witnesses involved,*
 Yet always give them back and never steal,
 While most of *us* just can't be trusted at all.

450

BLEPYROS. We even cheat in front of witnesses!

CHREMES. There are many other things he praised in women:
 They never inform, bring prosecutions, or try
 To destroy democracy. And much besides.

BLEPYROS. Well what was decided?

CHREMES. To give the women power.
 The Assembly thought that this was the *only* thing
 Still left untried!

BLEPYROS [*amazed*]. It's been agreed?

CHREMES. Indeed.

BLEPYROS. You mean that everything we males controlled
 Is now entrusted to women?

CHREMES. Precisely so.

BLEPYROS. So it won't be me, but my wife, who goes to court? 460

CHREMES. And it won't be you, but your wife, who keeps the
 family.

BLEPYROS. So I won't have to get out of bed with a groan at
 dawn?

CHREMES. No, all these things are now the task of women,
 And *you* can stay in bed and fart at ease.

BLEPYROS. But I've got one fear for men as old as us:
 Suppose that when they hold the reins of power,
 The women resort to force to—

CHREMES. Make us what?

BLEPYROS. To give them sex.

CHREMES. And if we just can't manage?

BLEPYROS. They won't allow us breakfast.

CHREMES. Then better comply,
 To guarantee we get both sex and breakfast!

470

BLEPYROS. *Compulsory* sex is a horrible thing!*

CHREMES [*grimly*].

But surely

If it serves the city, each man must do his duty.

BLEPYROS. It goes to show there's truth in that old saying:

No matter what foolish plans we make in Athens,

It all turns out eventually for the best.*

CHREMES. I pray to Athena and all the gods it does!

I must be off. Keep well!

BLEPYROS.

You too, Chremes.

[BLEPYROS *goes into his house and* CHREMES *off down the street. From the opposite direction the* CHORUS *returns from the Assembly.*]

CHORUS. March on! Proceed!

Let's check to see if any man is following in our tracks.

Turn round and look!

480

Pay close attention all the time; the rogues are everywhere.

Beware in case someone should creep behind and see we're women.

While walking on, be sure to stamp the ground with both your feet.

Strophe

What shame we all would have to face

If ever our design should be exposed among our husbands.

So stick together in close ranks,

And keep your eyes peeled all around,

This way and that, to left and right:

We can't afford to see our plan collapse into disaster.

Let's hurry on, there isn't far to go to reach the spot

From which we first set out to make our way to the Assembly.

490

Not far ahead you see the house belonging to our general,

The woman who devised this plan that's won the citizens' votes.

We've every reason, then, to start removing our disguise:

Antistrophe

We mustn't tarry, wearing beards,

In case we're seen in full daylight and soon informed against.

So move across into the shade
 Provided by this nearby wall,
 And while still glancing round about
 Convert yourselves, each one of you, into your female
 state.

Act quickly now! I see our general coming down the
 street. 500

She's on her way back home, of course, returning from
 the Assembly.

Each one of us must hastily remove her shaggy beard:
 These cheeks of ours have long been chafing under
 this disguise.

[*The CHORUS members start to remove their beards and male clothes.*
Enter PRAXAGORA, still dressed as a man.]

PRAXAGORA. Well, women, what success we've had today!
 Things have turned out exactly as we planned.
 But now we must be quick, before we're seen:
 Discard your cloaks, get rid of all men's shoes—
 'Unloose the leather reins that draw so tight'.*
 And, lastly, throw away your sticks. [*to LEADER*] But you,
 Keep all these women in order, while I slip 510
 Inside the house before my husband sees me,
 And put this cloak back where I took it from,
 As well as all the other things I borrowed.

LEADER [*pointing to beards, etc.*]. There! Everything is off. It's up
 to you

To tell us how to implement your plans.

I know I've never met a shrewder woman.

PRAXAGORA. Don't leave; I'll need advice in carrying out
 The office to which I've found myself elected.*

In the Assembly's noise and fury you proved your mettle.

[*PRAXAGORA approaches her house, but the door opens and BLEPYROS emerges. Soon afterwards, CHREMES reappears down the street and starts to listen.*]

BLEPYROS. Just *where* d'you think you've been, Praxagora? 520

PRAXAGORA. What's that to you?

BLEPYROS. What's that to me? How cool!

PRAXAGORA. You surely won't accuse me of having a lover.

BLEPYROS. Not *one*, perhaps.

PRAXAGORA. All right, you're free to check.
 BLEPYROS. But how?
 PRAXAGORA. Why, smell my hair for trace of scent.
 BLEPYROS. What? Can't a woman be fucked without some scent?*

PRAXAGORA. No, *I* can't—more's the pity.
 BLEPYROS. What made you, then,
 Slip out at dawn, and take my cloak with you?
 PRAXAGORA. I was sent for, in the night, by a friend of mine
 Who was giving birth.
 BLEPYROS. Then why not tell me first,
 Before you left? 530

PRAXAGORA. Instead of showing concern
 For the suffering mother?
 BLEPYROS. But *after* informing me.
 There's something suspicious here.
 PRAXAGORA. I swear there isn't.
 I left without ado: the woman's message
 Requested me to go without delay.

BLEPYROS. Then why not simply wear your very own cloak?
 You stripped off mine instead, left yours behind,
 And abandoned me to lie there like a corpse—
 You only forgot the wreath and funeral flask!*

PRAXAGORA. The air was chilly; you know I'm small and weak:
 I wrapped myself inside your cloak for warmth. 540
 But *you*, my husband, were lying all warm and snug
 When I left the house.

BLEPYROS. And why did you need to take
 My *shoes* with you? And what about my *stick*?
 PRAXAGORA. I thought I'd scare off muggers who'd steal the
 cloak.*
 I wanted to imitate *you* by stamping my feet
 And striking the ground with the stick as I walked along.

BLEPYROS. I suppose you know you've lost a bag of wheat,
 Which I could have bought with my pay for Assembly
 attendance?

PRAXAGORA. Never mind! The news is good—a baby boy!
 BLEPYROS [*obtusely*]. The Assembly's had a baby? 550

PRAXAGORA. The woman, of
 course!
 [*Casually*] But *has* there been an Assembly?

BLEPYROS. There certainly
has:
I mentioned it yesterday.

PRAXAGORA. Oh, now I remember.

BLEPYROS. So you haven't heard the decision?*

PRAXAGORA. No, certainly not.

BLEPYROS. Prepare yourself to hear some special news:
They say the city's been handed over to *women*!

PRAXAGORA. To weave its clothes?*

BLEPYROS. To be in charge!

PRAXAGORA. Of what?

BLEPYROS. Of every single part of the city's existence.

PRAXAGORA. By Aphrodite! That mean's the city's future
Is a happy one.

BLEPYROS. Why's that?

PRAXAGORA. For many reasons.
No longer will people be free to harm the city. 560
We'll put a stop to bribing of witnesses,
As well as to informing—

BLEPYROS. In heaven's name,
Don't do this: don't deprive me of my living!*

CHREMES [*intervening*]. You really should allow your wife to
speak.

PRAXAGORA. There'll be an end to mugging; an end to envy;
An end to paupers walking round half-naked;
An end to abuse; an end to harrying debtors.

CHREMES. Immense improvements, surely—if she's right!

PRAXAGORA [*to* CHREMES]. I'll give you proof. You'll soon be on my
side,
[*Pointing to* BLEPYROS] And even *he* won't contradict my
claim. 570

[HALF-AGON: 571-709]

CHORUS.
Now concentrate your mind! Rouse philosophical thoughts!*

Your female friends depend on your intelligence.
Amid prosperity that's shared by all
Your eloquent tongue will glorify
The citizens to whom you bring such countless benefits.

It's now or never—show your worth!
 The city needs a brilliant new invention.
 Make sure your plans
 Are quite original in word and deed.
 (This audience hates to see old stuff served up again!) 580

LEADER. Proceed at once, and get to grips explaining your intentions:

To keep things moving quickly always pleases these spectators.

PRAXAGORA. Well now, I have no doubts about the merits of my case.

But will the audience, that's my fear, accept my innovations,

Instead of sticking with the old, familiar repertoire?

BLEPYROS. As far as innovation goes, you needn't be afraid:

There's nothing we like better than abandoning tradition!*

PRAXAGORA. In that case, please don't interrupt or start to shout and heckle,

Until you understand my scheme and hear it from my lips.

My plan is that all property from now on must be *shared*.* 590

We must abolish rich and poor, with one man farming acres

While down the road another lacks enough land for his grave.

Or one man owning many slaves, another owning none.

I now decree that everyone must share the same resources.

BLEPYROS [*butting in*]. But *how* be 'shared'?

PRAXAGORA [*exasperated*]. You'd even be the first to eat the dung!

BLEPYROS. Well, isn't dung a thing we share?

PRAXAGORA. So what? Don't interrupt!

I was just about to tell you that the city's land and silver,

As well as private property, will now belong to all.

We women will use these common goods to feed the population:

For we'll control expenditure, and budget circumspectly. 600

CHREMES. Suppose that someone has no land, but hidden property—

Say, gold and silver coins?

PRAXAGORA. He'll need to add them to the pool.
He won't escape, unless he lies.

BLEPYROS. But *that's* what makes him
wealthy!

PRAXAGORA. But even if he does, he'll be no better off.

CHREMES. Why not?

PRAXAGORA. No one will suffer poverty. They'll all have quite
enough
Of bread and fish and cakes and clothes and wine and
wreaths and chickpeas.
So what's the use of hoarding wealth? That's what I'd like
to know.

CHREMES. But as things stand it's *wealthy* folk who steal to
boost their riches.

PRAXAGORA. That used to be the case, my friend, when previous
laws applied.

But once our lives are communist, withholding wealth
won't pay.

610

BLEPYROS. Suppose that someone sees a girl, and wants to—
poke her fire:

He'd pay for her from private wealth, then once he'd slept
with her

He'd still enjoy the common goods.

PRAXAGORA. But *sex* will now be free!

For women too will all be shared—yes, both for making
love,

And also bearing anyone's child.

BLEPYROS. But surely men will turn
Exclusively to the prettiest ones; it's those they'll want to
bang?

PRAXAGORA. But all the less attractive ones will sit beside the
beauties.

Before a man can take his pick, he'll lay a vile one *first*.

BLEPYROS. But once we older men have had it off with ugly
women,

Our cocks will surely start to droop before we reach the
others?

620

PRAXAGORA. I don't suppose they'll fight for *you*; don't worry
yourself at all.

BLEPYROS. Why not?

PRAXAGORA. Because such impotence is just your normal state!

BLEPYROS. Your plan makes sense on *women's* side. You've made entirely sure

There won't be any holes unfilled. But what about the *men*?
Won't women shun the hideous ones, and go for handsome types?

PRAXAGORA. The lousy men will have to track the handsome ones each evening;

They'll watch their movements everywhere and keep them in their sights.

The women won't have access to the tall, attractive men
Until they've given pleasure to the little, ugly fellows.

BLEPYROS. Lysikrates' revolting nose will start to look quite pleased then!

630

PRAXAGORA. That's right. What's more, my plans are meant to favour common people.

They'll have a chance to cock a snook at swanks with signet-rings,

By getting in first and telling them, 'Please step aside and wait there:

I'll let you have your turn when *I've* completed all my business.'

CHREMES. But once we live as you describe, how ever will each person

Know who his children are?

PRAXAGORA. Why care? The children will consider

All men who've reached a certain age as being their own fathers.

BLEPYROS. That means that when they don't know who their father is, they'll throttle

Not one but all old men. As now they throttle their *actual* fathers!*

If parentage becomes unknown, they'll shit on all old men! 640

PRAXAGORA. But witnesses won't let it pass. Before, they didn't bother

When seeing others beaten up; but now, each time it happens,

They'll intervene in case it proves the victim's their own father.

BLEPYROS. The general plan is fine, no doubt. But what if
 Epikouros
 Or Leukolophos should come to me and call me 'Dad'? How
 dreadful!*

PRAXAGORA. I can think of something worse than that.

BLEPYROS. Well tell
 me what it is.

PRAXAGORA. If Aristyllos *kisses* you and claims you as his father.

BLEPYROS. He'd get a thrashing, if he tried!

PRAXAGORA. And *you* would stink
 of something!

But *he* was born before our new decree came into force;

You needn't fear his kiss at all. 650

BLEPYROS. That's just as well for him!

CHREMES [*intervening*]. Now, who will work the land?

PRAXAGORA. The slaves.

And *your* concern will be

To wait for evening shadows to fall, and then slip off to
 dinner.

CHREMES. And what about acquiring clothes? Another urgent
 question.

PRAXAGORA. You'll keep the ones you've got for now; we
 women will weave you more.*

CHREMES. I've one more question. What's the rule for fines
 incurred in law courts?

How will they pay? It can't be right to use the common
 funds.

PRAXAGORA. There won't be any *need* for courts.

BLEPYROS. You'll soon
 regret that statement!

CHREMES. That's my view too.

PRAXAGORA [*to* BLEPYROS]. Then tell me why the courts will
 still be needed.

BLEPYROS. For lots of reasons, patently! Let's take just one
 example:

To deal with debtors who don't pay up. 660

PRAXAGORA. And how will
 anyone *lend*,

When all belongs to a common fund? It's clear he'd be a thief.

CHREMES. An excellent response!

BLEPYROS. But something else I'd like to
 know:
 What penalty will be imposed in cases of assault,
 When after-dinner brawls occur. Let's hear you answer *that*.
 PRAXAGORA. They'll forfeit some of the food they eat. When
 punished in this way,
 The price their belly pays will make them act with more
 restraint.
 BLEPYROS. Will no one ever turn to theft?
 PRAXAGORA. What for, when all is
 shared?
 BLEPYROS. Won't muggers still steal cloaks by night?
 PRAXAGORA. Not if you
 sleep at home!
 Such crimes will vanish from our streets, since none will
 suffer want.
 And if a mugging does occur, what reason for resistance? 670
 The common fund will soon provide another, better cloak.
 BLEPYROS. Won't people gamble still with dice?
 PRAXAGORA. What *stake* would
 be involved?
 BLEPYROS. What style of life will you offer us?
 PRAXAGORA. A life that's shared
 by all.
 I'll turn the city into one great dwelling-house for all;
 You'll come and go just as you please.
 BLEPYROS. And where will dinner
 be served?
 PRAXAGORA. I'll soon convert the law courts and the stoas to
 this purpose.
 BLEPYROS. But what will you use the podium for?*
 PRAXAGORA. For bowls of
 wine and water.
 I'll also make the boys stand there for poetry recitals.
 They'll sing the praises of the brave, and mention any
 cowards.*
 The cowards then will feel such shame they'll never dine. 680
 BLEPYROS. How
 splendid!
 But where will you put the allotment racks?*

PRAXAGORA.

Where else? In

the Agora.

They'll stand beside Harmodios,* dispensing supper tickets,
Till everyone is satisfied and knows his place for dinner.
The herald's voice will tell them which locations match
their letters:

For some the Royal Portico, the one next door for others;
And others still will find themselves in the Barley-Market
Stoa.*

BLEPYROS. It sounds as though they'll hardly starve!

PRAXAGORA.

They'll all

receive their dinner.

BLEPYROS. But anyone who draws a blank will surely be ejected.

PRAXAGORA.

Such things will not occur with us.

We'll guarantee rich fare for all,

690

So everyone, once nicely drunk,

Will leave in a mood of revelry.

And as they walk along the streets,

The women will solicit them

And call, 'Come here, inside this house.

We've got a ripe young girl in here.'

'No, here instead!' another shouts,

As she leans her head from a window above.

'I've a girl up here who's gorgeous and white;*

But before you can have her you've got to sleep

700

In *my* bed first!'

Meanwhile all handsome adolescents

Will be observed by ugly men

Who'll say to them: 'Just hold on there!

You're wasting your time if you rush ahead.

The law now states explicitly

It's the ugly ones who get first fuck.

You'll have to stand outside and wait:

Perhaps you ought to pass the time

With a double-handed wank.'

So, are you both quite satisfied?

710

BLEPYROS.

Not half!

PRAXAGORA. Well, I'm now needed in the Agora,

To receive all property that's brought along;

I'll take a fine-voiced heraldess with me.
I hold elected office, so that's my task;
And I've got to organize communal meals,
So *you* can have your first grand feast today.

BLEPYROS [*incredulous*]. The feasts will start immediately?

PRAXAGORA. Of course!

My second task is to ban slave prostitutes,
Yes, all of them.

BLEPYROS. What for?

PRAXAGORA. It's surely clear.

[*Pointing to* CHORUS] So *they* can have the best young men
themselves.

720

We don't want slave-girls looking beautiful
And stealing sex away from free-born women.
They're allowed to sleep with only fellow-slaves,
And must let their pussies keep their shaggy state.*

[*Starts to leave.*]

BLEPYROS. I think I ought to come along with you.

I'd like to attract attention and hear men say:
'Look, there's our lady-general's splendid husband.'

[*Follows off* PRAXAGORA *by a side entrance.*]

CHREMES. And I'll prepare my goods for the Agora:

I need to check what property I've got. [*Into house.*]

[CHORAL INTERLUDE]*

[CHREMES *reappears from his house: helped by slaves, he brings out objects which he arranges like members of a ritual procession at the Panathenaic festival.*]*

CHREMES. Come out here, sieve, and see you look your best; 730

I've picked you out from all of my belongings
As basket-carrier,* since your face is powdered
By all those bags of flour you've polished off.
Where's the girl who'll carry the stool?* You, cooking-pot,
Come out. My word, you're black! You must have boiled
The stuff with which Lysikrates dyes his hair.
[*Putting the pot behind the sieve*] Stand next to her. And
you come here, young maid.

Now, you there, water-carrier, bring that pitcher;*
Stand over here. And you, young girl musician,*

Come out: your singing's often woken me up 740
 To send me out at dawn to Assembly meetings.
 Come forward next, the one who carries the bowl.
 Bring honeycombs, put olive branches there.*
 Bring out the tripods too and flask of oil.
 You can let the riff-raff come and join us now.*

[*Slaves bring out further miscellaneous pots and pans. As CHREMES organizes everything, the NEIGHBOUR reappears along the street.*]

NEIGHBOUR [*musings to himself*]. To think of handing in my own belongings!
 It would ruin me! What an idiot I would be!
 It's out of the question, until I've found out more
 And watched the situation very closely.
 I've sweated and stinted to get my livelihood: 750
 I don't intend to lose it, like a fool,
 Before I learn precisely what's afoot.
 [*Noticing CHREMES*] You there! What's all this household stuff
 you've got?
 Have you brought it out because you're moving house,
 Or to pledge against a loan?

CHREMES. No, certainly not.

NEIGHBOUR. Then why's it all lined neatly up like this?

Don't tell me you're sending it off to public auction?

CHREMES. I'm about to carry it off to the Agora

And hand it in to the city. That's now the law.

NEIGHBOUR. To hand it in? 760

CHREMES. That's right.

NEIGHBOUR. You've sealed your fate!

You'll ruin yourself.

CHREMES. How come?

NEIGHBOUR. How come? It's clear!

CHREMES. You mean I shouldn't carry out the law?

NEIGHBOUR. What law, you fool?

CHREMES. The one that's just been passed.

NEIGHBOUR. That's just been passed! You really are quite crazy.

CHREMES. I'm crazy?

NEIGHBOUR. Of course. There can't be anyone else

Who's so naïve.

CHREMES. For doing what I'm told?

NEIGHBOUR. You think that *sensible* people do what they're told?

CHREMES. I certainly do.

NEIGHBOUR. No, only imbeciles!

CHREMES. You mean you won't give in your things?

NEIGHBOUR. I'll wait,

Until I see just what the majority do.

770

CHREMES. They're surely getting ready to take their goods

And give them in.

NEIGHBOUR. I'll believe it when I see it!

CHREMES. You can hear them saying so in the streets.

NEIGHBOUR [*ironically*]. No doubt!

CHREMES. They're vowing they'll take it all along.

NEIGHBOUR. No doubt!

CHREMES. I hate your sceptical tone of voice.

NEIGHBOUR. No doubt!

CHREMES. I'd like to see you blasted then!

NEIGHBOUR. No doubt!

D'you think that anyone sane will bring his goods?

That's not the Athenian way. We only like

To *take*, not give. In fact, we're like the gods.

You only need to look at their statues' hands:

780

For while we're praying they'll give us favourable gifts,

They stand there stretching out an upturned hand

And wait to *receive* a gift, not give us one.*

CHREMES [*turning away*]. Look, fellow, please leave me alone;

I've lots to do.

I've got to fasten these things. [*to slave*] Now where's my strap?

NEIGHBOUR [*incredulous*]. You're actually going to take them?

CHREMES. Of

course I am!

I'm tying these tripods, look.

NEIGHBOUR. Such lunacy!

Instead of holding back and waiting to see

What others do, and only then—

CHREMES. Do what?

NEIGHBOUR. Wait a little longer still, and play for time.

790

CHREMES. But what's the point?

NEIGHBOUR. Suppose an earthquake happened,

Or a lightning flash, or a cat went rushing past.*

They'd soon stop handing things in, you dunderhead!
 CHREMES [*unmoved*]. A fine old mess I'd be in, if I couldn't find
 Any space to put my things!

NEIGHBOUR. Is *that* your worry?

There'll still be space in two days' time.

CHREMES. Why's that?

NEIGHBOUR. I know the Athenians' ways: they're quick to *vote*,
 But they soon go back on all their resolutions.*

CHREMES. I tell you, they'll bring their goods.

NEIGHBOUR. But what if they
 don't?

CHREMES. It's certain, they're bound to do it. 800

NEIGHBOUR. But what if they
 don't?

CHREMES. The rest of us will *force* them.

NEIGHBOUR. What if they're stronger?

CHREMES [*shrugging*]. I'll leave them to it.

NEIGHBOUR. But what if they sell
 your goods?

CHREMES. Damnation on your head!

NEIGHBOUR. But what if I'm damned?

CHREMES. I'll celebrate!

NEIGHBOUR [*incredulous*].

Do you *want* to take your goods?

CHREMES. I do, because I see my neighbours too
 Are taking theirs.

NEIGHBOUR [*ironically*].

I'm sure Antisthenes

Will hand in his! I think he'd rather spend

A whole month shedding a different load—his shit!*

CHREMES. Get lost!

NEIGHBOUR. But will Kallimachos, chorus-trainer,
 Have something to give? 810

CHREMES. Well, more than Kallias will!*

NEIGHBOUR [*exasperated*]. This fellow will let his property
 go to ruin!

CHREMES. What tosh!

NEIGHBOUR. What tosh? You seem to be forgetting
 The Assembly's always voting for such decrees.
 Don't you know the one we passed on the price of salt?*

CHREMES. Of course I do.

NEIGHBOUR. Or when we voted to use
Bronze coinage—don't you recall?

CHREMES. Not half! Those coins
Were almost the death of me. [*reminiscing*] I sold some
grapes

And made my way, bronze coinage in my mouth,*
To go and buy some grain in the Agora.

Then just as I opened my sack, to have it filled, 820
The herald shouted that henceforth no bronze coins
Were legal tender: 'The currency's silver now.'*

NEIGHBOUR. And didn't we, only the other day, all swear
We'd raise five hundred talents from the tax
Euripides proposed as state-accountant?*

At first we showered Euripides with praise.
But when we thought again, it started to seem
The same old story—another nasty tax.
So then we all reviled Euripides!

CHREMES. But things are changing, friend. It used to be us, 830
But now it's the *women* in charge.

NEIGHBOUR. Which makes me wary
In case they plan to piss all over me!

CHREMES. Enough of your nonsense! [*turning*] Slave, my
baggage-pole.

[*As CHREMES watches his slave pick up his belongings, a female HERALD enters from a side entrance.*]

HERALD. All citizens of Athens, attend to this!

Come, hurry along to see our lady-general
And find out how the lot has fallen out
In assigning each of you to a dining hall.*

The tables have been set up; they're standing laden
With all the finest foods you could ever imagine.

The couches are draped with rugs and coverlets. 840
The wine is being mixed; the perfume-girls

Are standing waiting. The fish is being grilled,

The hares are on the spits, the cakes are baking,

The garlands are being made, the nuts are roasting.

The youngest women are boiling pots of soup.

[*Suggestively*] Among them Smoios, garbed in *riding* gear,

Is cleaning the women's dishes—with his lips.*
 Geron has turned up there in his dandy's clothes:*
 He's cracking jokes with another 'young' companion,
 And has thrown aside his usual shoes and cloak. 850
 So come along! The slaves are waiting ready
 To serve you bread: make sure your mouths are open!
 NEIGHBOUR. I'll get along straight away. Why loiter here,
 Now that the city's established this new regime?
 CHREMES. But where are you off? You've not surrendered your
 goods.
 NEIGHBOUR. To dinner.
 CHREMES. The women won't let you, if they're wise,
 Until you hand in your goods.
 NEIGHBOUR. I will.
 CHREMES. But when?
 NEIGHBOUR [*nonchalantly*]. I don't intend to make a fuss.
 CHREMES. You what?
 NEIGHBOUR. I'm sure I won't be the last to hand things in.
 CHREMES. You're really going to dine? 860
 NEIGHBOUR. I can't avoid it:
 We've got to give the city all possible help,
 If we've got good sense.
 CHREMES. But what if the women exclude you?
 NEIGHBOUR. I'll charge right in, head-first.
 CHREMES. But what if they whip
 you?
 NEIGHBOUR. I'll take them to court.
 CHREMES. But what if they laugh you
 down?
 NEIGHBOUR. I'll stand by the door—
 CHREMES. And after that, what then?
 NEIGHBOUR. I'll snatch the food from people who carry it in.
 CHREMES [*dismissively*]. Make sure you turn up after me! [*to his slaves*]
 Sikon
 And Parmenon, pick up my worldly goods.
 NEIGHBOUR. Now let me give you a hand.
 CHREMES. That won't be needed:
 I'm worried that when we reach the lady-general 870
 To deposit these things, you'll claim that some are yours.
 [*Exit CHREMES with his slaves.*]

NEIGHBOUR. Well blast! I'm going to have to find a ploy
 To guarantee my property stays my own
 Yet I get my share of the common meals as well.
 [*Ponders*] Yes, surely that will work! I must be off
 To claim my dinner at once without delay. [*Exits.*]

[CHORAL INTERLUDE]*

[*An ageing woman, hideously made-up in anticipation of the new sexual communism, appears at one of the doors.*]

HAG^A. What's keeping the men? They should have come long
 ago.
 And here I am, my face all plastered white,
 Standing by my door in this yellow chiffon dress.*
 I've nothing to do but hum myself a tune 880
 In the hope of having some fun by catching a man
 As he passes by. [*airily*] O Muses, come to my lips,
 And help me find a sexy Ionian song.
 [*She starts to hum, as the GIRL sticks her head out of a window next door.*]

GIRL. So you managed to slip out before me, then, you crone?
 You thought that while I wasn't around you might
 Pick all the *grapes* for yourself, and lure a man
 By singing. Well *I* shall sing a rival song!
 [*Ironically*] I don't suppose it's what the audience wants:
 But you never know, it might prove quite amusing.

HAG^A [*gesturing obscenely*]. That's what I think of you. Just 890
 disappear!
 [*To the piper*] Now, piper darling, take your instrument
 And play a tune that suits both you and me.

[*The piper obliges with a sensual melody.*]

[*Singing*] Anyone who wants a good time
 Ought to come and sleep with me.
 Young girls lack sophistication;
 Riper women know the tricks.
 If a man becomes my partner,
 True love will be his, for ever and a day:
 I'll not run off to another!

GIRL [*singing at the window*]. 900

Young girls shouldn't be derided.
 We have soft eroticism
 All around our tender thighs
 And upon our lovely breasts.
You, old depilated crock with painted face,
 Only death could fancy!

HAG^A. May your orifice prove quite useless!
 May you find you've got no fanny,
 When you're ready to be laid!
 When you're lying waiting to embrace your love,
 May you find you've caught a *snake*! 910

GIRL [*to a different melody*].
 Oh dear! Whatever will happen to me?
 There's no sign of my boyfriend
 Though I'm waiting all alone
 (My mother's left the house):
 What need is there to tell you any more?
 [*To HAG^A*] I beg you, granny, go and fetch
 A leather companion for yourself,
 To give you *solitary* pleasure.*

HAG^A. Corrupted by Ionian lust,
 You've got the itch, poor thing!
 I think you'd use your tongue in Lesbian style.* 920
 You needn't think you'll poach
 My fun from me; you can't
 Deprive me of my prime! [*The music finishes.*]

GIRL. You can sing what you like, and slink out like a cat.

HAG^A. I'm making sure it's *me* they'll come to first.

GIRL. To attend your funeral! There's a new one, crone!

HAG^A. A new one!

GIRL. Well, old hags have heard them all.

HAG^A. It's not my age that will cause you pain.

GIRL. What then?

I suppose it'll be the look of your cosmetics?

HAG^A. Stop talking to me! 930

GIRL. And *you* stop lurking around!

HAG^A. Why should I? I'm singing a song for my lover's sake.

GIRL. A 'lover' of yours? He must be geriatric!

HAG^A. You'll find out soon, when he comes to pay a visit.

GIRL [*suddenly*]. Well here he comes at last!

HAG^A. But not for you,
You shrew!

GIRL. O yes he is, you rotten cow!
He'll show you soon enough. I'm going inside.

[*Leaves the window.*]

HAG^A. I'll go in too: my pride is greater than yours!

[*She steps back into the house. Enter a YOUTH, intoxicated, garlanded, and carrying a torch. He starts to sing in the style of a drinking-song.*]

YOUTH. I long to sleep in my girlfriend's arms.
If only I didn't have to bang
An ugly harridan first!
It's just too much, for a free-born man.

940

HAG^A [*reappearing, picking up the tune*].
You'll soon regret, if you bang your girl!
Old women are now *à la mode*.
The law says come to *me*!
It's only right, in democracy.

I'm going to watch precisely what you do. [*Steps back inside.*]

YOUTH. If only, gods, I found my girl alone!

I've had some wine; my lust's now running strong.

GIRL [*reappearing at window*]. I've managed to trick that
infernal little hag!

She's gone away, believing I wouldn't come back. 950
But here's the man we were talking about before. [*She sings.*]

Come here to me, come here to me,
O love of mine, come here to me!
Come close to me, and in my bed
Resolve to spend the night with me.
I feel a dizzy passion for
The locks of hair upon your head.
The pressure of a strange desire
Is wasting all my life away.
Release me, Eros, from this pain!
Make sure this man
Comes to my bed!

YOUTH [*answering*].

Come here to me, come here to me, 960
O love of mine, come down to me!

Rush down and open up the door,
 Or I'll collapse and pine away.
 I long to lie in your embrace
 And wrestle with your buttocks.
 O Aphrodite, I'm mad about her!
 Release me, Eros, from this pain!
 Make sure this girl
 Comes to my bed!

Those words of mine can hardly show the force of love I feel.
 O darling, please, I beg you now and plead with all my
 heart: 970

Unlock the door and hold me tight!
 It's for you I suffer so much!

O sweetheart dear, my golden treasure, Aphrodite's flower,
 My honey-bee, my lovely Grace, O face of tenderness,
 Unlock the door and hold me tight!
 It's for you I suffer so much!

[*He starts to knock on the GIRL's door, as she leaves the window to come
 down. But HAG^A emerges first.*]

HAG^A. You there! You must be knocking for me.

YOUTH. Not likely!

HAG^A. You were *battering* on my door.

YOUTH. I'm damned if I was!

HAG^A. Well *who*'ve you come to find, with that torch of yours?

YOUTH [*evasively*]. A chap who knocks around a lot.

HAG^A. Who's that?

YOUTH. Well it isn't the fucker that *you* require, I'm sure! 980

HAG^A. I swear by Aphrodite, you've got no choice.

YOUTH [*ironically*]. This isn't the over-sixties' day, you know;
 We've put your cases off till another time.*

It's the under-twenty girls I'm dealing with.

HAG^A. But, sweetie, that's how things once *used* to be.

They've changed; it's *us* you've got to satisfy first.

YOUTH. I can choose the piece I like—that's the rule of the
 game.

HAG^A. You've had a free meal: we're playing a different game.

YOUTH [*turning*]. You're talking nonsense: I'm knocking on *this*
 door here.

HAG^A. But not until you've knocked on *my* door first. 990

YOUTH. It's not your crumbling entry I'm looking for.

HAG^A. I know you love me: you're just surprised to find

I'm waiting at the door. So give me a kiss.

YOUTH [*ironically*]. But I'm terrified of your lover, my dear.

HAG^A. Who's
that?

YOUTH. That brilliant artist.

HAG^A. I don't know who you mean.

YOUTH. The one who paints white oil-flasks for the dead!*

You'd better go, before he sees you here.

HAG^A. I see your aim.

YOUTH. And I see yours, all right!

HAG^A. By Aphrodite, who picked me out at birth,

I'll never let you go. 1000

YOUTH. You're mad, old crock!

HAG^A [*pulling*]. Just stop this twaddle! I'll get you into bed.

YOUTH [*to audience*]. Why bother to buy those hooks we use in
wells,

When a bent old crone could be lowered down instead

To lift the buckets of water up to the top?

HAG^A. Stop mocking me, cruel thing! You'll follow me.

YOUTH. You can't compel me—you haven't paid the city

The tax that has to be paid on property transfers.*

HAG^A. By Aphrodite! you've got to come with me:

It's men of your age I like to take to bed.

YOUTH. But women as old as you I find repulsive! 1010

You haven't a hope of persuading me.

HAG^A [*producing a document*].* But *this*

Will leave you no choice.

YOUTH. What's that supposed to be?

HAG^A. A decree which says you're obliged to pay me a visit.

YOUTH. Well read out what it actually says.

HAG^A. I shall.

'The women hereby decree that should a young man

Desire a young girl, he may not bang with her

Until he knocks an older woman first.

But if he refuses, and still desires the girl,

The law entitles all the older women

To drag him where they want—and by the knob! 1020

YOUTH. Oh no! It sounds exactly like Prokroustes!*

HAG^A. We've now got *women's* laws to be obeyed.

YOUTH. But what if one of my demesmen or my friends
Should come and bail me out?*

HAG^A. No *man's* allowed
To handle large sums of money any longer.*

YOUTH. Does the law permit excuses?

HAG^A. No dodging's allowed.

YOUTH. I'll claim I'm a merchant: they get exemption.*

HAG^A. Like hell!

YOUTH. So what must I do?

HAG^A. Just follow me here inside.

YOUTH. Do I have no choice?

HAG^A. The compulsion's absolute!

YOUTH [*melodramatically*]. In that case, lay a funeral bier for
me:

1030

Throw down the herbs and spread the broken twigs;
Prepare the ribbons, and fetch the flasks of oil;
And place the water-jug outside my door.*

HAG^A. You've also got to buy a garland for *me*.

YOUTH. Provided it's made of wax—to put on your tomb.

I expect you to crumble to pieces before my eyes.

[HAG^A starts to pull him into the house, just as the GIRL appears at the
next door.]

GIRL. And where are you dragging him off?

HAG^A. In here: he's mine.

GIRL. You won't, if you've got any sense. He's far too young

To go and sleep with you: you're old enough

To be his *mother*, instead of a wife for him.

1040

If you older women should implement this law,

You'll make the city swarm with Oedipuses!*

[*She snatches the* YOUTH.]

HAG^A. You loathsome creature! You've made up this excuse

From envy. I'll soon revenge myself on you. [*Rushes into house.*]

YOUTH. By Zeus the Saviour! I owe my life to you,

My darling, for getting me out of that old crone's clutches.

I'll pay you back tonight for this piece of help:

[*Lewdly*] Your reward will be something rather long and thick.

[*As the GIRL takes the YOUTH towards her house, the even more hideous*
HAG^B, with a large ruddy face, appears from another door.]

HAG^B [*to GIRL*]. Hey you! I'll have you know you're breaking
the law

By dragging him off: it says in black and white
He must come to *my* bed first.

1050

YOUTH. Oh what a fate!
What hole did *you* crawl out of, foul-faced bag?
This monster's more appalling than the last!

HAG^B [*grabbing YOUTH*]. You'll come with me!

YOUTH [*to GIRL*]. You've got to
intervene:

She's dragging me off.

HAG^B. But you're being dragged away
By the law, not me.

YOUTH. It's a spook who's tugging me off!
She looks like a large, inflamed, and bloody blister.

HAG^B. Just follow *me*, you coward, and stop your drivell.

YOUTH [*desperately*]. Please give me a chance to go and relieve
myself:

I need to try to recover my self-composure.

1060

Otherwise you'll see my fear will soon produce
A yellow substance.

HAG^B. Don't worry! You'll shit indoors.

YOUTH. Not half! I fear I'll never be able to stop.

[*Changing tack*] Please let me go: I'll provide two sureties
To cover my bail.

HAG^B [*dragging him*]. Don't bother.

[HAG^C, with a face of death-like whiteness, bursts from another door and
grabs the YOUTH, who does not at first see her face.]

HAG^C. And where d'you think
You're going with her?

YOUTH. Me, 'going'? I'm being abducted!

Whoever you are, I wish you all the best:

You've saved me from disaster. [*Sees HAG^C's face*] O Herakles!
O Pan! O Korybantics! O Dioskouroi!*

This monster's more grotesque than the one before.

1070

Please tell me just what kind of thing you are.

Perhaps a monkey plastered with white cosmetics?*

Or a crone who's come back up from the land of the dead?

HAG^C [*tugging*]. Enough of your gibes! Now follow me in.

HAG^B [*likewise*]. No, *me*!

HAG^C. I'll never release my grip.

HAG^B. But nor will I.

YOUTH. You'll tear me down the middle, you hideous sluts!

HAG^B. It's *me* the law requires you come to first.

HAG^C [*proudly*]. No, not if an uglier woman presents a claim.

YOUTH. But once I've been destroyed by you two women,
How will I ever reach that lovely girl? 1080

HAG^C. That's your affair: this takes priority.

YOUTH. But which one gets laid first, if I want to escape?

HAG^B. Once more, it's *me*.

YOUTH [*pointing to HAG^C*]. Then *she* should let me go.

HAG^C [*still tugging*]. It's *me* you come to first.

YOUTH [*pointing to HAG^B*]. If *she* lets go.

HAG^B. I'm damned if I'll let you go!

HAG^C. And so am I!

YOUTH. Thank goodness you don't run ferry boats.

HAG^B. Why's that?

YOUTH. You'd sever your passengers' bodies right down the
middle!

HAG^B. Shut up and come in here.

HAG^C. No, into *here*.

YOUTH. It's clear Kannonos' law is still in force:*

I'm going to have to fuck 'while held in fetters'. 1090

How on earth can I row with both my oars at once?

HAG^B. You'll manage all right, once you've eaten a dish of
onions.*

YOUTH. Destruction's close! She's dragged me to the door
And almost in!

HAG^C [*to HAG^B*]. It won't make any difference:
You'll pull me in as well.

YOUTH. No, anything else!

One monster's bad enough: I can't face two.

HAG^C. I'm clinging, whether you want me to or not!

YOUTH. Calamitous plight! To have to fuck this cow
Right through the night, and through the day as well,
And then, once free of her, to have to deal 1100
With a toad whose cheeks are white as a funeral urn!*

What a ghastly life—a god-forsaken life!

Preserve me, Zeus! I face annihilation

If I'm going to be penned in with beasts like these!
 [To audience] There's one thing, though; if my ship should
 founder here,
 While being piloted by this pair of tarts,
 You can place my grave right by the harbour mouth
 [Points to HAG^C] And stick this hag on top of the monument:
 Just coat her in pitch, and fasten down her feet
 By pouring molten lead around her ankles; 1110
 Then put her on top of the tomb—instead of an urn!*

[HAG^B pulls him indoors, with HAG^C continuing to hold on. Along the street, in very tipsy condition, comes a female SERVANT belonging to PRAXAGORA.]

SERVANT. How happy the people of Athens! How lucky am I!
 And happiness sublime is Praxagora's!
 [To CHORUS] The same is true of you women there round
 the door,
 And all you neighbours, as well as the locals here,
 And finally me myself, a slave attendant,
 Whose head is drenched in lovely fragrances.
 They smell so fine! But a better bouquet still
 Is the one that comes from jars of Thasian wine:
 It fills your head long after you've drunk the wine, 1120
 While other bouquets quickly fade away.
 Yes, Thasian wine's the best—the very best.
 Pour it me neat!* It'll keep us happy all night,
 If we choose the jar that has the best bouquet.
 Come, tell me, women, I need to find the master—
 Or rather, find the husband of my mistress!

LEADER. If you stay where you are, I think you'll soon find out.

[BLEPYROS himself comes along the street, carrying a torch and escorted by dancing-girls.]

SERVANT. You're right, he's here; and on his way to dinner.
 O master, what felicity is yours!

BLEPYROS. What, me? 1130

SERVANT. Yes, you: there isn't a happier man.

For how could anyone know superior fortune?

Of thirty thousand citizens, maybe more,*

You're the only one who's still got dinner to come.

LEADER. You've certainly made him sound a happy man!

SERVANT. But where are you heading for now?

BLEPYROS.

I'm off to dinner.

SERVANT. You're going to be the very last of all.

Your wife had already told me to come and find you,

And take you along in company with these girls.

There's Chian wine still left for you to drink,

With other good things too. So hurry along,

1140

And if there are any spectators who like the play,

Or any judges who don't feel ill-disposed,

They should go with you. The entertainment's free!

BLEPYROS. But why not issue a generous invitation

To *everyone*? Show hospitality rich

To old men and young, and even to little boys.

The dinner's prepared and waiting on the table

For one and all—at least, back in their homes!*

It's time for me to hurry to dinner myself.

I've got my torch here ready to light the way.

1150

LEADER. What's keeping you? You should be getting along,

And taking these girls. But while you're making your way,

I'll sing a little song for dinner-time.

I want to give the judges some advice.*

[*Declaiming*] *Clever* judges ought to vote for me—because

I'm clever too!

Those who like a hearty laugh should vote for me—I give
them laughs.

On reflection, I suggest that *every* judge should vote for me!

Don't allow the order of the plays to shape your attitudes.*

I've been first, but just remember, when you come to place
your votes,

Not to break the oath you took, but judge us all
impartially.

1160

Don't behave like courtesans—you know the lousy type I
mean:

Those whose memories don't extend beyond the last affair
they had.

CHORUS [*starting to dance*]. Oh! Oh! Now's the time,

Let's begin to kick our legs and start to dance along the
street.

Dinner waits, my women dear. [*to BLEPYROS*] And you too,
friend, should join the dance

In the Cretan style we set.*

BLEPYROS.

Yes, absolutely, here I go!

CHORUS [*singing*].

Lithe and agile, stamp the rhythm with your legs.

Think of what's coming:

[*Singing the following sentence without drawing breath*]*

Slices of salt-fish and shark-fish and dog-fish and

Pieces of mullet with pickled accompaniments, 1170

Dripping with silphium,* honey, and olive oil,

Thrushes and blackbirds and pigeons and ringdoves and

Chicken and roast lark and sumptuous wagtail and

Fillets of hare-meat in alcohol sauces.

Now you've heard the list of dishes,

Run along swiftly and pick up your plate.

When you've got it, don't delay:

Find some—porridge to fill you up!*

[*Exit BLEPYROS with dancing-girls, followed by the frolics of the celebrating CHORUS.*]

Guzzling's under way by now!

Lift your legs up! Shout for joy! 1180

Off to dinner! Shout for joy!

Hurray, hurrah! We'll win the prize!

Hurray, hurrah! Hurray, hurrah!

ASSEMBLY-WOMEN

- 3 *like a god's*: Greek prayers/hymns often cited the birth of a deity, and important events in its life. Praxagora's lamp is partly a humble surrogate for the Sun-god himself, partly an accomplice to conspiracy.
- 13 *singe*: on female depilation, see n. at *L.* 89.
- 16 *blab*: Praxagora speaks as though accepting the (comic) stereotype of women as secret and compulsive consumers of food and drink; cf. 44–5, 132, 154–7, 226–7 below, with n. on *L.* 64.
- 22 *Phyromachos*: unidentifiable (though he may have been a minor politician or an actor), and no convincing explanation of the passage has yet been proposed.
- 31 *herald's voice*: announcing the imminent Assembly meeting; cf. the herald's role at *A.* 43 ff.
- 46 *thingummy's wife*: here, as also at 41–3, 49, 51, I have omitted proper names which are in the Greek; although these might conceivably be those of real Athenians, they are probably fictional, and in any case it is the gossipy flavour that matters.
- 64 *get a tan*: because both social practice and (consequent) aesthetic taste made Athenian women typically paler than men, the wives have deliberately spent longer than usual in the sun: see nn. on 699, 878.

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- 71 *Epikrates*: a contemporary politician, noted for a supposedly large beard.
- 78 *farting Lamia's*: the joke plays on the husband's name, Lamios, and that of Lamia, a disgusting bogey of folklore (cf. *W.* 1035, 1177).
- 80–1 *Argos . . . cowherd*: Argos, a multi-eyed giant of mythology, was set to guard Io after she had been turned into a cow by Zeus; cf. Aischylos, *Prometheus Bound* 677–9.
- 96–7 *hitched . . . Phormisios*: women sometimes hitched up their clothes for wool-working (cf. n. on *L.* 537); the hairiness of Phormisios (perhaps the same man as at *F.* 965) allows the substitution of his name for the female pudenda.
- 102 *Pronomos*: otherwise unknown; the implication may be that he had been the lover of Agyrrhios (see Index of Names).
- 109 *neither sails nor oars*: an expression of nautical origin for a hopeless or powerless condition.
- 110 *'But how . . . congregation'*: a line in tragic style (adesp. 51, *TrGF* II).
- 112–13 *young men . . . politicians*: a piece of popular cynicism about homosexual availability as a route to political success for young males; cf. *K.* 424–6, 878–80, *C.* 1093–4.
- 127 *grilling*: cf. the women's attempt to tan themselves, 64.
- 128 *cat*: perhaps from ignorance, Praxagora substitutes a domestic pet for the pig which was used in purificatory ritual at the start of the Assembly; cf. *A.* 44 ff. for this and other aspects of Assembly procedure.
- 129 *Ariphrades*: for an earlier comic target called Ariphrades, see *K.* 1281, *W.* 1280, *P.* 883; we cannot say whether we have the same person here, or even a real person at all.
- 133 *garland*: Praxagora meant the garland as a practice sometimes used by public speakers in the Assembly (cf. *K.* 1227, *WT* 380), but Woman^A assumed—in bibulous fashion (cf. n. on 16)—that she had a symposium in mind.
- 137 *unmixed*: see n. on *L.* 197.
- 143 *archers*: Scythian slaves who helped the Prytaneis to keep order; see 258, *A.* 54, *K.* 665. 'Abuse' refers to the practices of political invective: see 248 ff.
- 155 *by the two goddesses*: this oath, by Demeter and Persephone, is characteristically female; cf. 532, and *L.* 112.
- 167 *Epigonos*: otherwise unknown, the butt of a standard comic slur on a man's masculinity; cf. n. on *We.* 800 for interplay with the audience.
- 188 *payment*: Assembly pay had been introduced originally by Agyrrhios (see Index of Names), somewhere around 400, at a rate of one obol (see 302); he subsequently proposed an increase from two to three

- obols: see 292, 309, 380–93, 547–8, *We.* 171, 329–30. Three obols may have been about a third of the daily rate of wages for certain jobs by the early fourth century (cf. n. on *B.* 18).
- 190–1 *oath . . . Assembly*: the principle is the same as with an oath ‘by the two goddesses’, 155.
- 194 *this league*: probably the original anti-Spartan league of Athens and Thebes, formed in 396/395; we do not know who the proposer (195) was.
- 197–8 *Suppose . . . farmers*: the generalization implies that ‘poor’ urban citizens were the most likely to seek work as oarsmen in the navy (cf. n. on *We.* 172); the opposition of the rich would stem from their responsibility, under the system of liturgies (whereby the cost of certain civic requirements devolved upon rich individuals), for equipping triremes.
- 199–200 *at one time . . . credit*: the reference need not be specific, but it probably alludes to fluctuating relations in the years around 395–393.
- 201 *‘Argives . . . shrewd’*: the snippets of popular opinion may allude to Argive opposition to a peace with Sparta in 394–393, and perhaps the support of Hieronymos (otherwise unknown) for the same peace.
- 202–3 *We caught . . . required*: the allusion may be to events in the aftermath of the battle of Knidos, summer 394, when Athens’s naval superiority might have allowed her to negotiate from a position of strength; Thrasyboulos (see Index of Names), like other leaders of the democracy, fluctuated in popular esteem.
- 208 *Aisimos*: probably a contemporary politician of this name; the point of the personal gibe can only be conjectured.
- 212 *purse strings*: see the similar reference to women’s domestic financial responsibilities at *L.* 495.
- 220 *novel schemes*: Athenians may have thought of themselves, in their popular self-image, as given to innovations and inventiveness; Thucydides 1.70.2 and 1.102.3 suggest that others, at least, thought of them that way. Cf. 586–7.
- 243 *on the Pnyx*: we are probably meant to think of the later years of the Peloponnesian War, when the presence of a Spartan garrison at Dekeleia in north-west Attika from spring 413 led many Athenians with farms to move into the city. Praxagora took the opportunity (but is the suggestion absurd?) to eavesdrop on Assembly meetings.
- 247 *general*: cf. n. on 518.
- 248 *Kephalos*: an important democratic leader (see Demosthenes 18.219, 251), whose family presumably owned a pottery business (253).
- 265 *lifting . . . legs*: the same sexual position is mentioned at *L.* 229.
- 279 *sing*: cf. the old jurors’ singing at *W.* 219–20.

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- 284 *nothing . . . to show*: receipt of Assembly pay (n. on 188) depended on attendance at the start of the meeting; cf. 292.
- 291 *Archon*: Athens had nine major magistrates called Archons; six of them, *thesmothetai*, had responsibility for the daily running of law courts.
- 292 *pay*: see n. on 188.
- 296 *tickets*: those admitted at the start of the meeting received a ticket entitling them to pay (n. on 188); cf. the ‘ticketing’ system for the courts, *We.* 278.
- 302 *single obol*: see n. on 188
- 317 *knocking*: Blepyros refers to the exigent need of his bowels.
- 356 *blockade*: an unknown political incident or proposal relating to Athenian dealings with Sparta.
- 365 *Amynon*: otherwise unknown; he may have been a political figure, and thus the object of a standard sexual slur (see n. on 113).
- 366 *Antisthenes*: he too cannot be identified securely; cf. 806.
- 371 *chamber pot*: see *W.* 807 for such a prop.
- 379 *crimson rope*: a rope smeared with vermilion dye was once used to try to *make* people attend the Assembly (before payment was instituted); cf. *A.* 22. Here the same device appears to be used to keep people out when the meeting is full.
- 387 *white faces*: the women with their white complexions (n. on 64) are compared to cobblers because the latter too spent relatively little time exposed to the sun.
- 392–3 ‘*Antilochos . . . mine.*’: a quotation from Aischylos *Myrmidons* (fr. 227, *TrGF* III); Achilles, speaking to Antilochos (cf. *Iliad* 18.2), is bewailing the loss of his friend Patroklos; ‘three obols’ bathetically replace the dead hero.
- 397 *preservation*: the Prytaneis (see Index of Names) had called for an urgent debate on the political state of affairs; for the theme of ‘preservation’ or ‘salvation’, cf. *L.* 30.
- 406 *smear it*: cf. the similarly stinging poultice at *We.* 716 ff; for a garlic poultice, see also *W.* 1172.
- 408 *Euaion*: not otherwise known; he is depicted as a demagogue who exploits his (supposedly) humble background to appeal to the poorest citizens.
- 426 *Nausikydes*: a prosperous grain merchant (cf. Xenophon, *Memories of Sokrates*, 2.6.7).
- 428 *white . . . Nikias*: for the significance of ‘white’, see nn. on 64, 699, 878; Nikias, possibly a nephew of the fifth-century general (see Index of Names), is cast as an effeminate.
- 432 *cobblers*: see 385.
- 439 *informer*: cf. 562, and see nn. on *B.* 1423, *We.* 918.

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- 448 *Informally*: an intriguing glimpse, notwithstanding the comic context, of the kind of ‘network’ that might exist between women in different families; cf. Theophrastos, *Characters* 10.13.
- 471 *Compulsory sex*: cf. Lysistrata’s sentiment at *L.* 162–3.
- 475 *for the best*: a piece of traditional Athenian folk psychology; cf. *C.* 587–9.
- 508 ‘*Unloose . . . tight.*’: a quasi-tragic line; perhaps a partial quotation.
- 518 *elected*: Praxagora speaks as though she had been voted into the office of ‘general’ which the women had originally had in mind for her (cf. 246, 491, 500); this is assumed later in the play, at 727, 835, 870.
- 525 *scent*: cf. the sexual humour at *L.* 938–47.
- 538 *wreath . . . flask*: see n. on 1033.
- 544 *muggers*: other comic references to the dangers of Athenian streets, especially at night, occur at 565, 668, and e.g. *B.* 496–8.
- 553 *heard the decision*: with the implication of this question cf. the wives’ political interests posited by Lysistrata, *L.* 513–14.
- 556 *weave*: Praxagora disingenuously plays along with the existing idea of a typical female activity (cf. *L.* 519); see 654.
- 563 *my living*: the joke depends on the implication that many Athenians exploited the legal system maliciously for personal gain; cf. 439, with the Informer scenes at *B.* 1410 ff., *We.* 850 ff.
- 571 *philosophical*: perhaps an allusion to the currents of intellectual speculation on which Aristophanes has drawn for Praxagora’s communistic scheme; see my Introduction to the play.
- 587 *abandoning tradition*: cf. n. on 220.
- 590 *shared*: Praxagora proposes a radical communism, first economic and then (613 ff.) sexual too; on the resemblance to Plato, *Republic* book 5, see my Introduction to the play.
- 639 *throttle . . . fathers*: the comically cynical (and quasi-Oedipal) motif of father-beating; cf. *B.* 1337 ff., *C.* 1321 ff.
- 644–5 *Epikouros . . . Leukolophos*: both unknown.
- 654 *weave you more*: despite the radicalism of her scheme, Praxagora suggests that women will continue to fulfil their conventional roles as makers of clothes (and food); cf. 556, and my Introduction to the play.
- 677 *podium*: the platform from which litigants presented their case.
- 678–9 *boys . . . sing*: poetry was regularly performed at banquets; cf. the (epic) poetry of heroism sung by the boys at *P.* 1265 ff.
- 681 *allotment racks*: devices—employing jurors’ tickets (cf. *We.* 278) and a system of black and white balls—for the random allocation of jurors to particular courts.
- 682 *Harmodios*: with Aristogeiton one of the two ‘tyrannicides’ who

- killed Hipparchos, brother of the tyrant Hippias, in 514 (see *L.* 619, 633, 1153); statues of the pair stood in the Athenian Agora.
- 685–6 *Royal . . . Stoa*: the Royal Portico or Stoa Basileios, which had administrative uses, stood in the north-west Agora; the location of the Barley-Market Stoa is not certain (cf. *A.* 548?). The Greek matches the initials of these stoas with the letters on the dining-tickets.
- 699 *white*: a white complexion, often heightened by cosmetics (n. on 878), was thought an ideal of female beauty.
- 724 *shaggy state*: i.e. slaves will not be allowed to practise genital depilation; see 12–13, with n. on *L.* 89.
- 729/30 *interlude*: at this juncture a choral interlude probably occurred in the original performance—a practice which later became the norm for act-dividing purposes in New Comedy’s five-act structure. Cf. 876/7, and *We.* 626/7, 770/1, 801/2; *We.* 321/2 may also fall into this category.
- 730 *Panathenaic festival*: see n. on *L.* 641–7. For the humour of personified utensils, cf. the trial scene at *W.* 936–9.
- 732 *basket-carrier*: see n. on *B.* 1551.
- 734 *carry the stool*: see *B.* 1552.
- 738 *pitcher*: water pitchers were carried at the Panathenaia by the wives of metics.
- 739 *musician*: a cock (despite its gender)?
- 743 *honeycombs . . . olive-branches*: bowls of honeycombs were carried at the Panathenaia by metics, and olive branches by old men (cf. *W.* 542).
- 745 *riff-raff*: Chremes’ household rubbish stands for the miscellaneous crowd following the official procession.
- 782–3 *hand . . . gift*: most surviving statues of deities do *not* have hands outstretched in this manner; but cf. *B.* 518 for a similar allusion.
- 791–2 *earthquake . . . lightning . . . cat*: three types of religious omen, though the last probably represents an excessively superstitious attitude (cf. Theophrastos, *Characters* 16.3).
- 798 *go back on*: for the idea of Athenians as prone to changes of mind, cf. *A.* 630–2.
- 806–8 *Antisthenes . . . shit*: see 366.
- 809–10 *Kallimachos . . . Kallias*: Kallimachos is unknown; the ironic contrast with Kallias (see Index of Names) points to a gibe at financial problems.
- 814 *price of salt*: we know nothing of this decree, which may have been related to imports of salt from Megara (cf. *A.* 521, 760).
- 818 *in my mouth*: for this Athenian habit, see n. on *B.* 503.
- 822 *silver now*: in the later fifth century the Athenians switched from

- their traditional silver coinage to silver-plated bronze (probably what ‘bronze’ means in this passage); they apparently switched back to silver at some point in the 390s.
- 825 *Euripides*: otherwise unknown. We do not know the exact nature of his putative tax; if it was a property levy, the figure of 500 talents (1 talent = 6,000 drachmas: see n. on *B.* 18) is exorbitant: between 377 and 357 Athens raised only 300 talents in this way (Demosthenes 22.44); cf. the general figure at *W.* 660.
- 836–7 *lot . . . dining hall*: cf. 681 ff.
- 846–7 *Smoios . . . lips*: otherwise unknown; he is imagined as engaging in cunnilinctus (cf. *K.* 1284–6, *W.* 1283, *P.* 885).
- 848 *Geron*: unknown; there is a play on his name, meaning ‘old man’.
- 876/7 *interlude*: see n. on 729/30.
- 878–9 *white . . . dress*: Greek women often applied white-lead cosmetic, to enhance a desirable paleness of complexion; cf. 929, 1072, *We.* 1064, with the note on 699. For the type of dress, dyed with saffron, see 332 and *L.* 47.
- 917 *solitary pleasure*: cf. the reference to dildoes at *L.* 108.
- 920 *Lesbian*: the modern meaning of the adjective is irrelevant here; see Index of Names, under ‘Lesbos’.
- 983 *cases*: sarcastic use of legal language; ‘sixties’ and ‘twenty’ pun on the idea of court cases involving particular sums of money.
- 996 *white oil-flasks*: the Youth plays on the whiteness of complexion thought desirable in women; cf. 1101, with n. on 699.
- 1007 *property transfers*: the Youth may imply that nothing less than the compulsion of slavery would make him accede to the woman’s sexual requests.
- 1011 *document*: we do not know how often individuals possessed copies of decrees; apart from the professional Decree-Seller of *B.* 1035 ff. (but a fictitious type?), *B.* 1288–9 apparently refers to stalls in the Agora where they could, like other goods, be bought.
- 1021 *Prokroustes*: legendary Athenian brigand who tortured his victims to fit a bed (cf. Eng. ‘procrustean’); the preceding lines contain an untranslatable play on the verbal root of his name.
- 1023–4 *demesmen . . . bail me out*: ‘demesmen’ are members of the same official deme (see n. on *B.* 645).
- 1025 *sums of money*: an inversion of the normal Athenian legal situation, in which women were prohibited from entering into contracts of more than a specified, modest value.
- 1027 *exemption*: merchants enjoyed special privileges, including exemption from military service and access to special legal procedures; cf. *We.* 904.
- 1030–3 *lay . . . door*: the Youth imagines standard funerary practices—the

- strewing of dittany and vine-twigs; ribbons (L. 603); oil-flasks (538, 996), which would subsequently be placed as urns on the grave (1111); a water-jug outside the door of the house; and wreaths, whether of fresh flowers or wax imitations.
- 1042 *Oedipuses*: the allusion is to Oedipus' unwitting incest with his mother Jocasta.
- 1069 *Dioskouroi*: i.e. Kastor (see Index of Names) and Polydeukes (Pollux), twin sons of Zeus and Leda, brothers of Helen; for other names, see the Index of Names.
- 1072 *white cosmetics*: see n. on 878.
- 1089 *Kannonos' law*: a decree (date unknown) which stipulated that certain offenders against the Athenian people should defend themselves in chains before the Assembly.
- 1092 *onions*: like certain other bulbous plants, these were sometimes regarded as aphrodisiacs.
- 1101 *funeral urn*: cf. 996 with n.
- 1108–11 *monument . . . urn*: the Youth pictures the Hag as a large, quasi-sculptural urn (cf. n. on 1033) attached to a base by lead (a technique also used for statues).
- 1123 *neat*: see n. on L. 197.
- 1132 *thirty thousand*: a conventional figure for the size of the Athenian citizen body (adult males), but possibly a reasonable estimate for the early fourth century (though some historians would think twenty thousand nearer the truth).
- 1148 *back in their homes*: the (deliberately?) corny humour is from the same mould as the songs at L. 1043–71; but here it seems to indicate a fading-back into reality from the fantasy of the play.
- 1154 *judges*: there are other addresses to judges at C. 1115 ff., B. 1102 ff; on the system of judging, see n. on B. 445.
- 1158 *order of the plays*: the order of performance was determined by lot.
- 1166 *Cretan style*: probably a high-stepping processional dance, traditional on the island.
- 1168 *without . . . breath*: in Greek, what follows is run together as a single, gargantuan word; cf. n. on B. 491.
- 1171 *silphium*: see n. on B. 534.
- 1178 *porridge*: another moment of comic bathos; cf. 1148.